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## C-17 Combat Training

*The new course graduates pilots who have experienced nearly everything the C-17 can do in a tactical situation*

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The USAF C-17 force took a step forward in combat capability recently when the first class of pilots completed a course that incorporates all the "lessons learned" on how to fly into harm's way in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The C-130 community has had a weapons instructor course (WIC) for many years. But no one expected the C-17 force to have to fly at low level or under fire very often. Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom changed all that as blackout approaches with night vision goggles became commonplace in a high-risk environment. An expeditionary airlift squadron at Rhein-Main Air Base, Germany, perfected a lot of the tactics and procedures needed to survive in an area that could turn hostile at any moment (AW&ST Mar. 10, 2003, p. 56).

Now a lot of that type of know-how is being taught in a much broader training course to prepare instructors who will beef up C-17 combat-flying expertise at the squadron, wing and headquarters level of Air Mobility Command (AMC).

Lt. Col. John Sullivan, the 57th Weapons Sqdn. commander, said the new C-17 WIC is an intensive program that includes 300 hr. of academics and 25 flights, many of which are in a simulated combat environment. The pilots accumulate about 125 flying hours in the program and write the equivalent of a doctorate-level thesis.

The 51/2-month program covers all aspects of mission employment of the C-17, including aircraft defensive systems, threats, advanced mission planning, aircraft performance, large-formation operations, airdrop and low-level flying. The flying includes "full-envelope" maneuvers such as reacting to a ground or air threat in a simulated combat situation using bank angles up to 60 deg. at 500 ft. AGL. The students, who are all instructor pilots before they arrive at WIC, see and experience everything the C-17 can do before returning to their squadrons and passing on their knowledge to other crewmembers.

The course also includes how to react to a man-portable air defense system (Manpad) attack, but the details are classified. On Dec. 9, a C-17 was reportedly hit by a Manpad after taking off from Baghdad, at which point one of its four engines exploded. The aircraft landed safely (AW&ST Dec. 15, 2003, p. 19).

In addition, a DHL/European Air Transport Airbus A300 was hit by a missile on takeoff from Baghdad on Nov. 22. The aircraft's left wing caught fire, but the crew was able to land safely without flight controls using only engine power. Video and still photos of the attack and the wing on fire are sobering reminders of what can happen (AW&ST Dec. 8, 2003, p. 42).

Sullivan said there will be 36 permanent C-17 weapons officer positions throughout AMC. But as the course graduates two classes of six pilots per year, that figure eventually may be exceeded. The final graduation exercise is a two-week wargame at Nellis AFB, Nev. In the one just completed at Nellis, C-17s, Navy F-14s and EA-6B Prowlers, as well as Luftwaffe F-4s and Tornados, flew realistic combat scenarios that included dropping German paratroops.

One student pilot said he hadn't realized before how much he didn't know about C-17 tactical operations. An

abbreviated nine-day version of the course, which highlights low-level flying and the use of terrain-masking to avoid surface-to-air missiles, is taught to crews by the Advanced Airlift Tactics Training Center (AW&ST Jan. 6, 2003, p. 46).